

THE ANSWER BOOK

REVISED 2016





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Doctor:

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Psychiatrist:

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Therapist/Counselor/Psychologist:

Name _____ Phone number _____

Mentor/Lifelong connection:

Name _____ Phone number _____

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See: <http://www.mass.gov/courts/selfhelp/family/answer-book-.html>



1. MAKING THE MOST OF DCF CUSTODY

Why am I in foster care?

You may be in foster care because your parents can't take care of you right now or because someone brought it to DCF's attention that you were not safe in your home or the judge wants you placed outside the home for other reasons.

What is foster care?

Foster care is the name of a system which places children into temporary or permanent care through foster homes, group homes, kinship care, or adoption.

What are my rights in foster care?

You have the right to be treated with respect by your social worker and lawyer and by everyone in your foster home. Respect means you are not discriminated against for your race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, or your social or cultural background. Tell your lawyer immediately if you are being treated badly in any way by those you should be able to trust. SEE THE FOSTER CHILD BILL OF RIGHTS AT PAGE 42.

What does my social worker do?

Your social worker makes sure you are safe and living in an environment where you can be happy, healthy, well cared for and getting the education and any medical care or mental health services you need. Your social worker will be visiting you at least once a month to hear from you how you are doing.

Should I have a lawyer and what should my lawyer do?

If you are 17 years old or younger and living in DCF custody because of a court order or as a young adult (aged 18 to 22) who has signed a Voluntary Placement Agreement, the court will appoint a lawyer to represent you. The lawyer will meet with you regularly, return your calls and explain the court process to you. Your

lawyer will talk to the judge and advocate for what you want. Your lawyer can help you get the services you need in school, for your health and for your legal case. If you do not know who your lawyer is, or if you have trouble contacting your lawyer, call the Children and Family Law Program (CAFL) at 617-482-6212.

Do I have the right to live with my family?

If you are in DCF custody through a Care and Protection case, Voluntary Placement Agreement or Child Requiring Assistance (CRA), you have the right to be placed with safe and available relatives after a home study is completed and approved by DCF. DCF will also try to place your brothers and sisters in the same home.

Do I have the right to visit my family?

If it is safe for you to do so, you have the right to regular visitation with your brothers and sisters, your parents, and your grandparents; however, this should be done in consultation with your social worker.

Sibling visits: If you are not living with your brothers and sisters, ask your social worker to arrange for regular visits, phone calls and letters. Regular visitation should be part of the service plan that DCF prepares with you and your family, provided such visitation will be safe and appropriate SEE THE SIBLING BILL OF RIGHTS AT PAGE 44. DCF should try to help you participate in celebrations including birthdays, holidays, graduations and other special events. Talk to your social worker or lawyer as soon as you know about a family event.

Visits with your parents: Unless contact with your parents has been determined to be unsafe for you, you should be given the opportunity to have telephone contact with your parent(s) within 24-48 hours of coming into placement and a face-to-face visit as soon as possible but no later than 5 working days after placement. In general, you should be able to visit with your parent(s) once a week unless your circumstances require a different schedule.

What should Foster Care be like?

If you are placed outside of your home, (in a place like a residential treatment facility, foster home, group home, and placements with relatives or family friends) and you feel any of the following statements is **'FALSE' or not true**, talk with your social worker or lawyer.

- I have access to the same things as kids and youth who aren't involved with DCF, such as time with friends, sleepovers, a normal curfew, dates, or even a chance to earn allowance.
- I am consulted about mental health and medical decisions for me.

- I am allowed to participate in community activities such as sports, volunteer work, employment, school events, mentorships, summer camp, class field trips, and other rites of passage with my peers.
- I experience clear and fair consequences, and the rules and policies here are clear, fair, and can be flexible.
- I can use technology and social networking sites (with age appropriate monitoring).
- I am allowed to build relationships, make choices, and make mistakes in an informed, supportive, and judgment-free environment.
- If I have spiritual and/or religious beliefs; I am able to participate in activities related to those beliefs.
- I am able to listen to age appropriate music and watch age appropriate TV shows and movies at this placement.
- I have privacy, love and safety.
- I am learning money management skills through opening savings plans, bank accounts, and establishing monthly budgets.

What is a Service Plan (or Case Plan)?

The service plan (which may also be called a case plan) is written by your DCF social worker and sets out all the services that should be in place. It lists services that you and your family may need. You should participate in the development and review of your service plan. If you don't know what is in your service plan or if you would like to add something to your service plan to help you or your family, let your social worker and lawyer know. Your lawyer should help you work with DCF or talk with DCF about what is on your service plan. If you are 14 or older your social worker should ask you to review and sign the service plan.

Who Can I trust to keep my secrets?

- Your lawyer is not allowed to talk about anything you say during your private conversations unless you say it is okay or UNLESS you plan to hurt yourself or somebody else or if you lie to the court.
- A social worker's job is to speak to the judge, lawyers, and your service providers to make sure you are living in a safe, nurturing place and you are getting the services you need. This means that social workers cannot and will not always keep what you tell them a secret, even if you ask them to.

What programs, groups, or information does DCF have for me?

- The Youth Advisory Board is a group of kids in DCF custody ages 16-21 who meet four times a year to share ideas and make recommendations on issues that impact kids in DCF custody, such as making visits with relatives easier and more frequent, playing sports at school, getting a driver's license or having sleep-overs. The Youth Advisory Board helps plan the Youth Leadership Institute, a statewide conference for youth in care on topics youth select and co-lead. To get involved ask your social worker.
- The Wave is the DCF youth newsletter written by and for youth in care. Published every three months, it has articles, poems, art, and information on activities such as Peer Support Groups, Higher Education Fairs, and Employment and Mentoring Programs. You can get a copy at your DCF office.
- The Adolescent Outreach Program provides intensive, individualized life skills help to prepare you for living on your own as a young adult. Outreach age eligibility is 16-21. DCF Adolescent Outreach Workers help you with planning for school, jobs, money management, and personal decision-making. Adolescent Outreach Workers can give you help applying to and finding money for college, a job-training program, or a certificate program as well as help finding internships and jobs. If you have an Adolescent Outreach Worker, s/he should meet with you EVERY WEEK while you are in care and will provide services to you for 6 months after you leave DCF. Outreach can serve youth who left care at age 18 up to age 21.
- Preparing Adolescents for Young Adulthood (PAYA) is a DCF life skill curriculum that helps you develop skills needed to transition to young adulthood. You can even be paid for participating!

See: <http://www.mass.gov/courts/selfhelp/family/answer-book-.html>



2. MAKING A PLAN

How do I plan for my future?

When you are in DCF custody, there is a process called “permanency planning” that can help you make a plan for your future.

What is “permanency planning?”

“Permanency planning” is planning for life after foster care. Planning ahead will help make sure that you have a permanent connection with an important adult in your life, a safe and permanent home, and the support you need to be safe and healthy and to reach your life goals. After you and your social worker, in conjunction with your lawyer and any other important people in your life, come up with a plan, the judge will look at it and decide whether to agree to it at a Permanency Hearing. Permanency is about helping you achieve physical, emotional and legal stability during and after you leave foster care.

What is the goal of permanency planning?

Permanency planning helps make sure that you have a safe and permanent home and the support you need to be safe and healthy and to reach your life goals. Permanency planning is also about helping you achieve physical, emotional and legal stability during and after you leave foster care. Planning ahead will help make sure that you have a permanent connection with an important adult in your life. No matter how old you are, you deserve at least one lifelong consistent relationship with a caring adult. A lifelong connection is a person to whom you can go for advice on things like applying to college or getting a job. It’s someone who will celebrate your successes and help you navigate your challenges.

Who is important in permanency planning?

- YOU!!!
- Your DCF social worker and the DCF lawyer
- Your lawyer
- The judge
- Parent, guardian, foster parent, brother or sister



What is the permanency planning process?

The basic steps of the formal permanency planning process include 1) you talking to your lawyer, social worker, caretaker, and other important people in your life about your goals and needs; 2) you taking part in meetings and court hearings about you; 3) your social worker writing a permanency plan report (with input from you and your lawyer and other important people in your life) about your future plans and what you need to achieve your goals; and 4) review by the judge of your plan.

What is a permanency plan report?

The actual “permanency plan report” is written by your social worker based on conversations she has with you, your lawyer, and other important people in your life. The report talks about what you want your goals to be and what kind of help DCF and others can give you so you can reach your goals. This plan is what the judge will look at in court to make sure your permanent plan is a good one.

What is a “permanency goal?”

One of the sections in your permanency plan will talk about your “permanency goal.” This part of the plan talks about where you will live and who the adults are that will help support you in the future. Your goal could be either to return to your family (called reunification), be adopted, or get a legal guardian. Your goal may be another placement until you are no longer in DCF custody or care.

How do I take part in creating my plan?

1. Talk with your social worker and lawyer about your plans for your future.
2. If you are 14 years of age or older, you may participate in your 6 week Placement Review.
3. Actively participate in your DCF Foster Care Reviews.
4. Go to court for your Permanency Hearing to talk to the Judge about your plan.

How do I work with my social worker in creating the plan?

By the time you turn 14, your social worker should also start talking with you about your plans for your future. When you meet, tell your social worker what services you need to help you be interdependent in the future. Interdependence means you are self-sufficient or that you have the independent living tools to take care of your responsibilities in life. Interdependence means you can be self-sufficient and still reach out to your life long caring adult for advice, networking connections and emotional support. Finding that lifelong connection is important no matter how old you are in DCF care.

Talk to your lawyer as well about what you want for your future. Tell your lawyer what you want to do, where you want to live, and what your plans are. Your lawyer should talk to your DCF social worker about the plan for your future.

Things to think about for your permanency plan:

- What do I want for my future? Have I told my lawyer or social worker?
- Who are some caring adults in my life who could be a life-long connection for me?
- What are my goals in school? How will I reach them? Can I get extra help?
- What services do I want or need from DCF?
- What help is there for me to continue my education after graduating?
- How will I get my driver's license, if I want it?
- How will I get around if I don't have a car or a license?
- How can I get and keep a job or get money to support myself?
- What if I am not a US citizen?
- What teen parenting services could I use, if needed?
- Where will I live when I turn 18? How will I afford to live there?
- When I leave DCF, how will I get health insurance or health care?
- Where do I get important documents like my social security card?

What should I look for in a lifelong connection to a Caring adult?

There is plenty of room in your life for multiple supportive adults, like aunts, uncles, coaches and mentors. You have a right to include your

birth family as part of your permanency circle of supportive adults. You can also add supportive adults to your life without taking the place of previously established relationships.

In order to determine if you already have lifelong supportive adults in your life, ask yourself if these statements are true for you.

1. The adults I live with now will care about me in the same way once I leave foster care.
2. I have an adult who I remember with a holiday card or some small birthday gift.

Ask yourself – Are there people in my life whom I trust that I already have a relationship with who could become my supportive adult? Talk with your social worker about how to include this person in your permanency planning. This person may be someone who is willing to create a permanency pact with you.

What is a Permanency Pact?

Once a supportive adult is identified as a potential lifelong connection, you may want to create a permanency pact with your supportive adult(s). You don't have to be formally adopted or have a guardian in order to create a permanency pact with a supportive adult. A permanency pact is a promise between a supportive adult and a young person. It is based on conversations you have with your supportive adult about the kind of positive supports you can turn to that adult for once you leave foster care.

You might ask the supportive adults in your life if they can provide some or all of the following supports once you leave foster care:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| ➤ Home for the holidays | ➤ Relationships/marriage advice |
| ➤ A place to do laundry | ➤ Transportation |
| ➤ Emergency place to stay | ➤ Assistance with medical appointments |
| ➤ Food/occasional meals | ➤ Talking through tough decisions |
| ➤ Care package at college | ➤ Storage |
| ➤ Employment opportunity | ➤ Motivation |
| ➤ Job search assistance | ➤ Spiritual support |
| ➤ Recreational activities | ➤ Legal troubles |
| ➤ Mentor | ➤ Cultural experience |
| ➤ Mental health support | |

It is okay not to be able to find all of these kinds of support in one person. This is why it is so important for you and your social worker to

build a permanency circle of multiple supportive adults by the time you leave foster care.

What is the permanency hearing?

The permanency hearing is at the courthouse, where the judge is focused completely on YOU and YOUR FUTURE. The hearings happen at least once every 12 months, but can be every six months if you are 14 or older. After talking with you, your social worker will write down your plan and then ask a judge to approve it in court. The judge will make sure the plan has what you need before agreeing to it. If you want to be there, you should tell your lawyer and your social worker. If you are 14 years of age or older, you are expected to be present at your permanency hearings. The permanency hearing should be on a day and time that is good for you, after school if you prefer. Your lawyer will request a different day or time for the hearing if needed and will tell the judge if you don't like the plan or want it changed.

What does my lawyer do at my permanency hearing?

Your lawyer should get a copy of your written permanency plan from DCF 30 days before the permanency hearing. Your lawyer should meet with you before the hearing to talk with you about the plan and to hear what you think about it. If you want to change something in the plan, your lawyer can tell DCF and the judge in court what it is you want. If DCF doesn't agree, your lawyer can ask the judge not to approve the plan. Your lawyer can make sure that you are brought to court for the hearing and can help you speak to the judge if you want to.

What if my hearing conflicts with another appointment or event in my life?

Tell your lawyer and social worker if you have a major conflict with the court date. They may be able to ask the court to re-schedule the hearing after school or at another time more convenient for you.

What clothes should I put on to go to court?

Most lawyers wear business suits to court. You do not have to put on a suit, but you may feel more confident if your clothes are clean and appropriate. If you follow the same dress code you have for school, you should be fine.

What do I say in court?

Talk to your lawyer about what you want to say about your future and whether there is anything you are uncomfortable talking about. You may want to write down some ideas before court. You can call the Judge "Judge" or "Your Honor."



3. EDUCATION

Do I have the right to attend school?

- Yes! Your right to go to school lasts until your 22nd birthday or until you get a high school diploma, whichever comes first. You may be able to remain in your school even if you move to a different town. If you change schools, you have the right to enroll and start classes immediately.
- If someone tells you that you cannot go to school, or tells you that you must change schools, talk to your foster parent and/or contact your social worker, your lawyer or the Children's Law Center of Massachusetts at 1-888-KIDLAWS.
- If your school keeps you out of school for a day or more (suspends you) or tries to keep you out of school permanently (expels you) for breaking a school rule, contact your social worker, lawyer, or the Children's Law Center. They may be able to work things out so you can stay at that school and not miss classes or important exams.

I'm worried I'm not going to graduate. Who can help me?

- Talk to your social worker, foster parent, teacher, and guidance counselor if you are behind in class. You may be able to get outside help or a tutor.
- Your teacher, parent, caregiver or social worker (or YOU if you are 18 or older) can request a special education evaluation. If the testing determines you have special learning needs, you will be able to have an Individual Education Program (IEP) written for you stating all the services you will receive to help you in school.
- If you leave school without graduating and want to earn your GED, now called HiSET (High School Equivalency Test), you need to meet the

requirements for taking the exams and then pass exams that cover 5 subject areas. Call the Massachusetts Adult Literacy Hotline at 1-800-447-8844 to find HiSET preparation programs near where you live or see <http://www.getrealmass.info/hotline/ged.htm>.

- For exam requirements, visit <http://www.doe.mass.edu/hse/req.html>

Can I go to college?

- Yes! As early as freshman year in high school, attend college fairs, career centers, and talk to your guidance counselor about what jobs interest you and what type of education you need for those jobs. Before attending a college, you must apply, get accepted and register to attend. Being in foster care is not a barrier to attending college.
- By the beginning of the 11th grade, you should be talking with your school guidance counselor about applying for college. You will also need to study and sign up for the SAT or ACT, tests you have to take for some colleges, but not at community colleges. Be sure to pay attention to the due dates on your college applications. An Adolescent Outreach Worker or your social worker can help you with college and vocational training questions.

How do I get money to go to college?

You may be able to get money for college by filling out and submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Assistance (FAFSA). Other programs include the Foster Child Grant Program and the Education and Training Voucher Program. You may also be eligible for a tuition waiver, which means you wouldn't have to pay tuition to attend a community college or state university in Massachusetts. If you want to go out of state, explore alternate funding with your social worker and school guidance counselor. The William Warren Scholarship Program provides competitive scholarships for educational and vocational programs to any youth under age 25 who was in the care or custody of DCF for a minimum of one year.

Who can help me figure out how to pay for college?

An Adolescent Outreach Worker or your social worker should help you decide if you are eligible, and help you fill out application forms for loans, grants, or other programs. Contact the DCF Adolescent Services Unit for help at 617-748-2232.



Tip: Contact DCF Adolescent Services Unit for more information at 617-748-2232. Contact the financial aid office at the colleges that interest you for more ideas on how to get money for that college, about scholarships and fees waived.



4. TURNING 18

Can I still receive the DCF services that I had before I turned 18?

YES! DCF can continue working with you until you turn 22. DCF will offer each young adult the opportunity to continue with DCF services beyond the age of 18. In order for DCF to approve your request to sign on after your 18th birthday, there are some things that you have to agree to that you should discuss with your social worker/adolescent outreach worker and lawyer. If you want to stay in DCF care and DCF agrees, you “sign on.” You are called a “young adult” instead of a “juvenile.”

Do I have to stay in DCF care when I turn 18?

No, but you can decide to stay in care. If you decide to leave care, DCF has to help you create a transition plan 90 days before you leave care, and the Judge has to review it and will approve it if it looks okay. Talk to your social worker and lawyer about whether you should stay in DCF care.

What does “signing on” with DCF mean?

Signing on means you stay in DCF care. You sign a Voluntary Placement Agreement that states that you are voluntarily agreeing to get services from DCF. You have to agree to do some things (e.g., allowing the social worker in your home once per month and going to school or working) and DCF keeps providing you with help and financial support.

If I am younger than 18, how do I sign on for services from DCF when I turn 18?

You can ask your lawyer or social worker to help you write a letter to DCF to explain what you want to do. **Plan ahead.** Don’t wait until after your 18th birthday to talk to your lawyer and social worker about this.

Your lawyer and you may need to negotiate with DCF about what you need to do to stay in DCF care and to keep getting services. It is best to start negotiating early on, well before you turn 18.

If I sign back on with DCF, what services can I receive?

You should receive at least:

- Health insurance (MassHealth);
- Referrals for services such as counseling and job training;
- Help applying and paying for college, a job training program, or a certificate program.

If I sign back on with DCF, where will I live?

It depends on your situation. DCF normally makes the decision about what to offer you for housing, but needs your opinion. You could live in a foster home, a supervised apartment, a college dorm, your own apartment, a group home, a residential program, or an independent living program. If DCF offers you a housing situation that does not work for you, contact your lawyer.

If I sign back on with DCF, how will I get money to live?

This also depends on your situation. DCF usually pays other people to care for you. DCF may:

- Pay your foster parents or guardians a daily amount;
- Pay a group home, independent living program, or apartment so you can live there;
- Pay you money for housing if you have shown that you are responsible with your money. You can then use the money that DCF pays you for rent, food, and other things you need; or
- Help you with applying for financial aid so you can live in a college dorm.

If DCF is not providing you or the person with whom you live money, contact your social worker and/or your lawyer.

Am I eligible for services from DCF if I have already turned 18 and have not signed on yet?

Yes, until your 22nd birthday. You should contact the DCF area office where you live and say that you want to apply for services. You will work with a social worker to come up with a plan, and then a Young Adult Review Panel will

determine whether you can sign on with the plan as presented, with a modified plan, or not at all. For a list of DCF offices see pages 38 - 41. If you are having trouble receiving services, ask for the Adolescent Outreach Worker at your DCF office or call Maureen Fallon Messeder at DCF at 617-748- 2231. She is in charge of Adolescent Services. You can also call the Children's Law Center (1-888-KIDLAW8, or 1-888-543-5298).

Can my old lawyer help me if I want to sign back on with DCF after I already left?

Yes, your old lawyer can help you try to return to DCF to get help. You can ask to come back to DCF, even if you left after you turned 18. When you leave DCF, try to keep your lawyer's business card and phone number so that you can reach your lawyer if you change your mind and want to go back to DCF to get services. You can ask to come back up until your 22nd birthday. If you decide you want to come back, you should contact your lawyer and ask him or her to help you. If you do not know who your old lawyer was or how to reach your old lawyer, you can find out by calling CAFL at 617-988-8482 or email: caflattorney@publiccounsel.net. Someone from CAFL will call the court to find out who your lawyer was. Sometimes the court clerk will not give out this information over the phone and you may have to go into court yourself to find out who your lawyer was.

What can I do if DCF tells me I can't sign back on?

Call your lawyer for help. If you don't have a lawyer anymore, you can always call your old lawyer or the Children's Law Center (1-888-KIDLAW8) for help. Your lawyer can help you negotiate with DCF and appeal through the Fair Hearing Process if DCF decides not to let you sign back on. To appeal, your lawyer or you can write a letter to the Fair Hearing unit at DCF to say that you want to sign back on and you want to appeal DCF's decision not to let you. There is a separate unit at DCF that looks at the letter and should give you a hearing, called a Fair Hearing. At the hearing, your lawyer and you can argue to an independent Fair Hearing officer that DCF should change its decision and let you come back. You can do this without a lawyer, but you should ask your old lawyer to help you.

How long will DCF give me services if I "sign on" or was just adopted or placed in guardianship?

If you sign on, you may continue to receive DCF services until age 22. If you went into guardianship or were adopted in your late teens, your guardian or adoptive parent may receive support for you from DCF until you are 22.

See: <http://www.mass.gov/courts/selfhelp/family/answer-book-.html>



5. GETTING AROUND

How do I get to and from after school activities?

Your social worker can help you find a way to go to and from after school activities if your foster parents can't. If your social worker can't help, talk to your lawyer. Can you read a bus, subway or train schedule? In some places, public transportation is often cheaper and more convenient than a car.

Am I allowed to get my learner's permit and a driver's license?

Yes! Kids in foster care can get their permit and license. You can get a learner's permit at age 16 and a driver's license at 16 1/2. To get your learner's permit you must pass a written multiple choice test. To get your driver's license you must pass a driving test. Get more information from the Registry of Motor Vehicles at www.massdot.state.ma.us/rmv/ or you can call (617) 351-4500. You can also get a copy of the Driver's Manual at www.mass.gov/rmv/dmanual.

Who should I talk to about getting my permit and license?

Your social worker is the best person to talk to about getting your permit and license. He or she gives permission and can tell you how to do it. You can also talk to your lawyer about it. If you are in DCF custody because of a Voluntary Placement Agreement or a CRA case, your parents or guardian will decide.

Who pays for getting my learner's permit, driving school and my driver's license?

Talk to your social worker, the Adolescent Outreach Worker at the DCF office near you (see pp. 38 - 41) and/or your lawyer about getting money to pay for your learner's permit, driving school and your license, and also to talk about whose car to use to practice and take your driving test. You may be able to earn money through participation in the DCF program, PAYA. For more information about PAYA, talk to your Intensive Foster Care Worker, your social worker or any Adolescent Outreach Worker.



6. WHAT ABOUT A JOB?

Can I get a job if I am younger than 18 and in DCF custody?

Yes. If you are under 18 you can work but you have to first get a work permit just like kids who aren't in foster care. To get a permit you must fill out an application called Employment Permit Application for 14 through 17 Year Olds. You can download this application from www.mass.gov/dos or get one from your school. All the steps for completing this application process can be found on the same website under The Massachusetts Guide for Working Teens, page 4. Talk to your school counselor about getting the permit.

Can I keep all the money I earn from my job while I am in DCF custody?

Yes. All the money you make is yours. As soon as you get a job, you should also talk to your social worker about opening your own bank account.

How can I look for a job?

- Apply at your local grocery store or retail stores
- Talk to your friends who have jobs, or to neighbors, teachers, your guidance counselor etc.
- Call your social worker or the Adolescent Outreach Worker in the DCF office near you (see pp. 38 - 41).
- Go to the Career Center in your area. They have job listings, career counseling services, job search workshops, workforce readiness training, information about getting money for job training, and other employment-related services. Call the Division of Career Services for more information and to find the Career Center near you: 617-626-5300.

- You can also look them up online at: www.mass.gov/careercenters
- Consider the following four programs to help you. Ask your social worker for more information or look these up online:
 1. Foster Skills gives you information about participating in a workforce development program that measures your skills and helps you gain improved access to the workforce. It is exclusively focused on empowering foster youth to beat the odds, follow your dreams and become successful productive citizens by giving you the skills you need for gainful employment. For more detailed information see: <http://www.fosterskills.org/>.
 2. Job Corps Program is a free career training and education program for young adults age 16 through 24. The goal of Job Corps is to teach job skills. Call 1-800-733-JOBS or 617-788-0186.
 3. YouthBuild is an education, job training, housing, and community service program for young adults age 16 through 24. This program can help you get your high school diploma or GED while teaching you carpentry and other construction skills. Call 617-445-8887.
 4. YouthWorks is a program for youth who are between the ages of 14 and 21. This program was developed to help youth who are court involved. See: www.massyouthemployment.org.

Can I get money from the state if I lose my job?

You may be able to get money from the state, called Unemployment Benefits, if you meet certain requirements. You can get more information at www.massresources.org/unemployment-eligibility.



7. MONEY MATTERS

Does DCF have to give me any money?

...when I am under 18?

DCF usually does not give you money directly. Instead, DCF gives money to your foster family or residential program twice a month for daily expenses. It also gives your program, foster family, or guardian money to spend on you for your birthday, for holiday/Christmas, and four times per year for your clothes.

...when I am over 18?

If you sign on to DCF after you turn 18 and continue with school or job training, you may receive Young Adult Support Payments (YASP) twice per month and/or some money for rent or college room and board up to age 22.

Does my foster parent, guardian, or residential program have to give me any money?

Your foster parents or guardians or custodians do not have to give you cash, but they should be spending money on things for you. The money they get from DCF is meant for you and the things you need while you are living there.

How do I pay for after school activities?

Speak with your social worker about whether DCF may be able to help with the fees or get you a scholarship (money from somebody else) for the activity. If DCF can't help, ask your lawyer for other ideas.

Can DCF help me get a copy of my credit report?

Yes, DCF will arrange for youth or young adults age 16 and older who are in DCF care or custody to obtain a copy of their credit report, if one exists, once a year and arrange for assistance in understanding the report.



Tip: A good source of help for life skills is through the PAYA (Preparing Adolescents for Young Adulthood) program that DCF offers. The first topic presented is about MONEY. You can even earn money by participating! Contact your DCF social worker or an Adolescent Outreach Worker for more information.

How it works when you're NOT in DCF custody

Is there any money I can get from the state?

If you are over 18 and not in DCF custody, you may be eligible to receive money from a program called Emergency Aid to Elders, Disabled, and Children (EAEDC). Call your local DTA (Department of Transitional Assistance) office for help.

If I am on my own, how do I get food or money for food?

If you don't make much money, you might be eligible for food stamps also called the SNAP program. Call the Department of Transitional Assistance SNAP Benefits Hotline at 1-866-950-3663 for more information. Also, most communities give out free food through pantries. To find food pantries or free meals in your community, call the Project Bread Food Source Hotline at 1-800-645-8333.

How do I get a bank account?

- If you are under 18, you may be able to get an "18-65 account," which is a bank account that does not have fees. Choose a bank with an office near you and tell that bank that you are eligible for an 18-65 account.
- If you are over age 18, ask for a basic banking account.
- To get an account, the bank will ask for a photo ID, your Social Security number, and some money to put in your account (called a minimum deposit).
- Don't be afraid to go into the bank, sit down with someone, and ask lots and lots of questions! It's your money!

When do I have to pay taxes?

- When you make a certain amount of money from working, you have to pay taxes to the federal government and the state government and file your tax return every year by April 15th.
- Even if you don't make enough money to PAY taxes, you might be eligible to GET money back you paid in taxes every paycheck.
- If you need help with taxes talk to an adult that you trust. There are a number of agencies or non-profits that will do your taxes for free if you don't make very much money.



8. HOUSING

Where will I live after I turn 18 and sign myself back on with DCF?

It depends on your situation. DCF normally makes the decision about what to offer you, but your opinion matters! You could live in a foster home, a supervised apartment, a college dorm, your own apartment, a group home, a residential program, or an independent living program. If DCF is not giving you a place to live or money to live, contact your lawyer.

Does DCF have places I can live if I did not sign myself back on after I turned 18?

If you do not sign on with DCF after age 18, DCF has limited housing help for you. DCF has:

- Few places to live;
- The Discharge Support Program, which may help you pay to get an apartment but will not keep paying your rent.
- The “Family Unification Program Adolescent Outreach Program Voucher,” which can help you pay your rent for a period of time NO LONGER than 18 months.

For help finding a place to live or to talk about these programs contact your local DCF office and ask to speak with the Adolescent Outreach Worker or ask your social worker to connect you with an Adolescent Outreach Worker. The phone numbers for the local DCF offices are on pages 38 - 41.

How much money do I need to move into an apartment?

Depending on the apartment and the landlord, you may need to pay the following things when you first move into an apartment:

- First month's rent
- Last month's rent
- A security deposit (This usually costs as much as one month's rent and it is not supposed to be more than one month's rent. You get this money back when you move out, as long as there is no damage to your apartment while you are living there.)
- A new lock fee
- Note that your landlord cannot charge you for water unless he has a permit from the city.

If I need legal help with my housing once I move out on my own, what can I do?

If there are problems with the condition of the apartment that you notice after you move in, take pictures and inform your landlord. If your landlord does not repair the problems then you should call your local board of health or inspection services.

All areas in Massachusetts have legal aid programs that have lawyers for people who don't earn much and have issues with their housing. Find free legal help in Massachusetts at this website: www.masslegalservices.org.

Where can I go if I become homeless?

For help in finding a program or shelter near you, you can call the National Runaway Switchboard at 1-800-RUNAWAY. It is free to call. If you are over 18, go to a local church or homeless shelter and ask for help. They can direct you to places where food, shelter, and other supports may be available. You can also contact an Adolescent Outreach Worker at 617-744-2231 who will assist you with resources such as transitional housing programs, affordable rental options, food pantries, food stamps benefits, counseling and education. You may sign back on to DCF care until your 22nd birthday.

Housing Checklist

- ☐ How much can I afford to pay in rent each month? (How much money do I get? How much will I have to pay for a security deposit, utilities, furniture, transportation, food, clothing, child care costs, entertainment, renter's insurance, health costs, etc.?)
- ☐ What utilities (water, gas, electric, cable, phone) are included in the rent? What utilities will I have to arrange and pay on my own? How much will they be?
- ☐ Will I need a roommate?
- ☐ Will I need a co-signor for my lease? This may be required if you don't have a strong credit history.
- ☐ Where do I want to live?
- ☐ Do I need to be near public transportation?
- ☐ Is the apartment near a grocery store?
- ☐ Is the apartment in an area where I feel safe?
- ☐ Are there appliances (refrigerator, dishwasher, laundry) in the apartment? If there is no laundry machine, am I near a Laundromat?
- ☐ Is the apartment itself clean and safe?
- ☐ Is there a working smoke detector and carbon monoxide alarm?
- ☐ Does the apartment have two exits in case of a fire?



Dial 211 for free confidential information on:

- **Shelter**
- **Food**
- **Rent assistance**
- **Utility bill assistance**
- **Counseling**
- **After School Programs**



9. IMMIGRATION

What are my options if I am in this country and I am an undocumented immigrant?

There are a few ways you can apply for documentation or permission to stay in the United States. You could apply for (1) asylum; (2) family reunification with family members who already have legal status or citizenship; (3) visas to protect victims of a crime or domestic violence in the U.S.; (4) special immigrant juvenile classification; and (5) Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

It is important to talk to your social worker and an experienced immigration lawyer to see if you are eligible to apply for any of these immigration protections.

How does someone become a citizen of the U.S.?

1. By being born in the United States, or
2. By having a parent who is a U.S. citizen at the time of a person's birth, or
3. By being adopted by a U.S. citizen; or
4. By applying to become a citizen.

If you don't fall into the first two categories above, you must first become a legal permanent resident (obtain a green card) before applying to become a citizen.

What does Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) mean?

Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) refers to a classification or protection that our federal government gives to some immigrant youth under age 21 who have been abused, abandoned or neglected by a parent. Once classified as a SIJ, you would be eligible to apply for a green card and obtain permanent legal residency.

What do I have to do to become a SIJ?

Step 1: Your social worker and/or lawyer ask the Juvenile Court or a Probate and Family Court judge to issue an order that states the following:

1. You are not married
2. You are under the age of 21
3. You cannot return to live with at least one of your parents because he/she abused, abandoned, or neglected you; and
4. You would be better off (it would be in your “best interests”) staying in the United States rather than being sent back to your home country.

Tip: Usually the SIJ order from the Juvenile or Probate and Family Court should be made before you turn 18.



Step 2: Your social worker and lawyer can take the order from the Juvenile or Probate and Family Court and ask the U.S. Government (United States Citizenship & Immigration Service or USCIS) to classify you as a “Special Immigrant Juvenile.” This step must be done before you turn 21.

Step 3: If that request is approved then you can apply to become a Legal Permanent Resident of the United States, and you will obtain your green card.

It is important that you ask for help from your lawyer and social worker if you are thinking about applying for Special Immigrant Juvenile classification.



Tip: If you are facing deportation or removal from the United States, and you are able to obtain classification as a Special Immigrant Juvenile, the Special Immigrant Juvenile classification will protect you from being deported.

What are some reasons for being deported?

If you are in the United States without permission from the U.S. Government to enter, you can be placed in “removal proceedings” (deportation) in the Immigration Court. You also can be deported if you entered the country legally, but stayed longer than you were supposed to. Also, if you have committed certain crimes in the United States, the government may try to deport you. If you find yourself in any of these situations, it is important that you attend all court hearings until your cases are resolved. Deportation is a very serious matter and you should not try to handle it by yourself. Get the help of an experienced immigration lawyer to figure out what to do.

If I am undocumented, Can I still attend college?

There is no law that requires proof of citizenship in order to attend college. However, some schools have different acceptance requirements for undocumented immigrants. You should research these policies before applying to a college to find out if the school requires proof of citizenship or legal residency in order to attend. Also, some financial aid (especially from the federal government) that helps pay for college for some foster care youth cannot be used by students who don't have documentation to be in this country.

If I am undocumented, Can I still get in-state tuition?

You are not able to receive in-state tuition at public universities if you are in Massachusetts without documentation. Because of this, you must pay out-of-state tuition at public universities in our state. In some instances, financial aid or scholarships to private colleges or universities may be available. Such information as well as costs of different colleges and universities can be found on their websites. You will be eligible for in-state tuition by becoming documented through DACA. See next question.

What is Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)?

DACA is a special program announced by President Obama on June 15, 2012. It allows some undocumented individuals, between the ages of 15 and 31 to apply for protection against deportation, and to work legally in the U.S. for a two year period. In order to qualify for DACA you must:

- Have come to the U.S. before turning 16
- Have lived only in the U.S. since June 15, 2007, up to the present
- Have been under the age of 31 and undocumented on June 15, 2012
- Be in school, have finished high school, have your GED, or have been honorably discharged from the armed forces of the U.S.
- Have not been convicted of certain crimes
- Have been in the U. S. on June 15, 2012, and when you apply for DACA

If you have DACA, you may apply to renew your status after the two year period expires. For more information, talk to an experienced immigration lawyer or check out the DACA website at:

<http://www.uscis.gov/childhoodarrivals>. If you live in Massachusetts and become documented through DACA, you will be eligible for in-state tuition.



10. PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Do I have the right to receive medical care while I am in DCF custody?

You absolutely have the right to receive physical and mental health care while in DCF custody. Within 30 days of entering foster care you should expect:

- Complete physical exam
- Dental assessment
- Mental health assessment.

If you need treatment, DCF will arrange for follow-up care including a specialist if that is what you need. Talk to your social worker or foster parent if you want to go to the doctor. Your caregiver should take you to your appointments or make sure you have transportation

Can I receive medical or mental health care while I am in DCF custody without DCF permission?

If you are under 18, you usually cannot receive medical or mental health care without DCF permission unless you

1. Are a parent or think you might be pregnant
2. Are a member of the armed forces
3. Want to be treated for problems with alcohol or drugs
4. Think you may need treatment for a sexually transmitted disease (STD)
5. Your doctor determines that you are a "Mature Minor" which gives you the power to make your own medical decisions or
6. It is an emergency.

If you have a medical emergency or feel suicidal, get help immediately **WITHOUT** waiting for permission!

How do I find out about or get birth control?

You do NOT need permission from DCF to find out about or get birth control.

See Chapter 12 on Pregnancy and Parenting at page 30.

What if I am sick or feel depressed?

You have the right to receive health care services including dental, mental and vision care. If you are 18 or older you may go by yourself to the doctor or mental health professional. If you are younger, for most reasons you go to the doctor or mental health professional other than those listed on page 26, contact your social worker or foster parent to arrange an appointment. Your caregiver should take you to your appointments or make sure you have transportation.

Why do I get meds for controlling how I feel?

Sometimes your feelings or behavior are causing you so many problems that you need help. Help can come from therapy or counseling. Medication may be able to help.

What if I use drugs or drink too much?

If you have problems with drugs or alcohol, talk to your social worker or lawyer or call the substance abuse helpline at 1-800-327-5050 or go to the website:

<http://nationalsubstanceabuseindex.org/massachusetts/facilities.php>. To find help in MA, call 866-705-2807

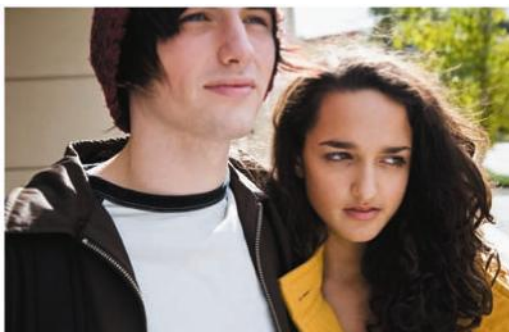
Can I have my own Health Records?

After the age of 14 you have the right to review or have a copy of any of your medical, dental, visual and mental health records. Ask for them at the doctor's office or through email or by phone. Before you leave the office, be sure you:

- Know the name and contact information for your doctor, dentist and counselor
- Have a record of your medical history including your immunizations and any current prescriptions
- Have a record of mental health assessments, treatments and prescriptions

What about insurance with MassHealth?

All youth in DCF custody have MassHealth, insurance that pays for your appointments. If you were in DCF custody when you turned 18, you should receive MassHealth until you turn 26 as long as you stay in Massachusetts. Be sure to give your social worker your new address when you leave DCF custody so MassHealth can mail you a new MassHealth card with a new number. Call MassHealth at 1-800-841-2900 for current information.



11. RELATIONSHIPS

Should I still care about my birth family?

Just because you are in foster care does not mean that your parents do not love you or that they are bad people. At the time, they may not have been emotionally, mentally, or financially stable enough to provide you with a loving home.

You can still love your parents and have affection, but you should also realize that your foster family also wants to provide you with love and care in the short- or long-term, which is why they opened up their home to you.

What if I don't like my foster family?

It is important to let the foster family know how you are feeling and see if something can be worked out between you and your foster family. Also talk with your lawyer and social worker about possible options to resolve the situation.

How do I create a better relationship with my foster family?

Respect them and talk to them about your thoughts and feelings. Relationships rely on respect and trust so improving these areas of your relationship with them is important. If you don't feel comfortable telling them directly how you feel, work with your social worker and/or lawyer to draft a letter detailing your feelings and expressing your thoughts.

What is Domestic Violence?

The way you know if you are experiencing domestic violence is if your boyfriend, girlfriend, partner, or spouse has a pattern of:

- Trying to control your life

- Hitting or touching you in a bad way
- Making you have sex without you wanting to
- Breaking your stuff
- Telling you they are going to do something bad to you.

How do I know if I am in a healthy relationship?

Have fun in your relationship, but be SAFE! Be clear about what you want to avoid:

- mixed up thoughts,
- confused feelings, and
- bad outcomes

What about sex?

Some teens choose not to have sex for religious, emotional or legal reasons. BE CLEAR! If you don't know someone well enough to talk about sex, you probably don't know the person well enough to have sex. Remember that the only guaranteed way to prevent having a baby is to NOT have sex.

How can I feel better about myself?

Begin with your thoughts! Try to think positively about yourself and say kind words to yourself instead of negative ones. Instead of saying, "I can't do this" or "I am ugly," remind yourself, "I can do this!" and "I am beautiful!"

TIPS TO FEEL BETTER ABOUT YOURSELF

- Do a good deed: Hold the door for someone or help someone in need.
- Boost your energy: Listen to good music or go for a little walk to get your energy flowing.
- Become an expert: Pick a random topic and research it on the web.
- Keep a resolution: Challenge yourself every morning to accomplish one thing by the end of the day.
- Make small gestures of kindness: Smile at strangers or ask someone how their day is going.
- Face a fear: Do something that you have put off or have been afraid to do.
- Make something by hand: Draw, paint, or express yourself creatively.



Tip: Call 911 immediately if you don't feel safe. Tell your foster parent, guardian, social worker, lawyer, or counselor and work to create a safety plan. SafeLink Hotline is: 1-877-785-2020.



12. PREGNANCY AND PARENTING

How do I find out about or get birth control?

You can speak to your doctor, social worker, or go to a local family planning clinic. They can talk to you about abstinence or nonprescription and prescription birth control options. If you want someone to talk to about this you can call 1-800-230-PLAN. You do NOT need permission from DCF to find out about or get birth control, family planning, or pregnancy tests.

What options do I have if I am pregnant?

If you are in DCF custody and believe you may be pregnant, are considering becoming pregnant, or are pregnant, you could think about: birth control, parenting, adoptions or abortion. You have the right to make your own decisions about your own medical care and whether you want to become a parent or not. To find a family planning service provider or education and outreach program by zip code, go to: www.plannedparenthood.org/teens. If you ask for help getting services for a pregnancy, your social worker must provide you with information and if necessary, help you make arrangements and get to appointments.

KEEPING THE BABY

Do I need permission to keep the baby?

No. If you are pregnant, you do not need permission to parent the baby. You have the right to parent the baby even if you are under 18. You do not need

your parents' permission. You do not need permission from DCF.

Does DCF offer any special services for pregnant and/or parenting teens?

Yes, DCF offers Teen Living Programs to girls aged 13 to 19 who are pregnant or have a child. For more information regarding the Teen Living Program call the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at (617) 748-2400.

Can I be forced out of school if I am pregnant or parenting?

No, under law the school cannot throw you out. You are able to stay in school whether you are pregnant or parenting.

ADOPTION

Do I need permission from my parent(s)/guardian(s) or DCF to put the baby up for adoption?

No. Your parent(s)/guardian(s) do not have to agree to the adoption; you don't even have to tell them. You do not need permission from DCF to put the baby up for adoption.

Will DCF transfer me from my foster or group home if I am pregnant but planning to give up my child for adoption?

You will not have to move unless the place where you are staying cannot support you while you are pregnant or after you have a baby. Talk to your foster parents or social worker about how your pregnancy may or may not affect your living situation.

Who can help me with adoption?

If you decide to have the baby adopted, you should discuss your options with your social worker, counselor, health care provider or a local family planning clinic, like Planned Parenthood, all of whom can provide you with information on adoption. You should talk to your lawyer or someone else you trust.

ABORTION

If I decide to get an abortion, and I am under the age of 18, what are my rights?

If you are **under** 18 and in DCF custody, you must go to a judge in Superior Court, not the judge on your Juvenile Court case, to get permission to have an abortion. The judge will appoint a lawyer to represent you.

If you are in DCF care because of a **voluntary placement agreement**, you can get permission from at least one parent or guardian. If you do not want to ask them or if they won't give permission, you can go to a judge for permission.

DCF can help you get information but **cannot** give you permission or represent you when asking the court to give you permission to have an abortion. You have the right to have a lawyer help you to get that permission.

If I decide to get an abortion, and I am **over** the age of 18, what are my rights?

If you are **over** the age of 18, you do not need any permission to get an abortion despite being involved with DCF. You have the right to make your own medical decisions, including obtaining an abortion.

Will my parent(s)/guardian(s) find out if I decide to have an abortion?

If you are under 18 and received a judge's permission to get an abortion, you can get the abortion without your parent(s)/guardian(s) being informed.

How long can I wait until I get an abortion?

A pill can be used earlier in your pregnancy than an in-clinic abortion, usually up to 63 days (9 weeks). To learn more about abortion, visit Planned Parenthood at: <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/abortion-4260.asp>.

If my foster parents, biological parents, social worker or the biological father want me to get an abortion, do I have to?

No! The decision regarding how to handle your pregnancy is **YOURS**. You may choose to keep the baby or have an abortion. Nobody can take this choice away from you – not your parents, relatives, foster parents, your boyfriend or his family, or your social worker.

FOR FATHERS

What can I do if I think I am the father of a child or a baby about to be born?

As long as you are the legal father—meaning, your name is on the birth certificate, you have the right to visit or live with your baby. You can also receive parenting services and support. The information provided below will help you understand your rights as a father while in DCF custody. However, if you have any questions, please talk to your social worker or your lawyer.

If I think I may have made someone pregnant, do I have the right to know for sure?

Women have the right to keep this a secret. They can get an abortion without informing the father or suspected fathers. However, if a woman decides to give birth to her child and you are legally found to be the father, you may have certain rights and responsibilities. You can file a paternity complaint after the baby is born if you want to be found to be the father.

PARENTING (for mothers and fathers)

Will DCF transfer me from my foster or group home if I am pregnant and decide to parent my child?

You will not be forced to move unless the place where you are staying cannot support you while you are pregnant or when you have your baby. Talk to your foster parents or social worker about how your pregnancy could affect your living situation. If you have to move, you have the right to be placed with your baby.

Can DCF take my baby away from me?

Your baby **does NOT** become a foster child just because you are in foster care. It depends on your ability to take care of your baby and keep your baby safe.

If you **abuse** or **neglect** your baby, or fail to take care of your baby (this could include running away, not getting the services you need to safely parent, or leaving your baby with someone who is not responsible), then DCF may take your baby out of your care. However, you and your lawyer can fight to get your baby back. Just keep in mind that, depending on your circumstances, you may not always be able to win back custody of your child.

Can I be forced out of school if I am parenting?

No, under law the school cannot throw you out because you are parenting.

Who will take care of my child while I'm in school?

There are programs that can help you with child care while you are in school. Talk to your social worker and your lawyer for help with child care.

Is there any financial assistance available to teen parents?

If you are a teen parent, you may be eligible for **Transitional Assistance to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC)**, a program for families who don't earn enough to provide for the basic needs of their children.

TAFDC gives cash benefits to families with dependent children and to pregnant women in the last four months of pregnancy if they meet certain requirements.

To find out if you are eligible for TAFDC, call 1-800-249-2007 or go to:

<http://www.mass.gov/dta/assistance>

What is child support?

Child support is money paid by the parent who does not live with the child. The parent who lives with the baby uses the money to take care of the baby.

How can I apply for child support?

If you are not receiving child support from the other parent of the baby, you can go the Department of Revenue and request child support. They will then file the complaint in court and do not charge for the service.



If you are out of DCF care and receiving cash assistance (TAFDC), you may not receive the child support money directly. It will go to the welfare department to pay it back for the money it is paying you for cash assistance. That means, since you are getting money from the state (through TAFDC), the state will take the child support money in exchange. Usually, the money you get from the state is more than what you'd get from child support, so this is typically the better deal.

Can I be asked to pay child support?

Whether you are in DCF custody or not, you can be asked to pay child support if the baby doesn't live with you. It doesn't matter if you're under 18 years old and still in high school or whether you are the mother or the father of the baby.

If I cannot pay child support, can I still see my child?

In Massachusetts, the order for child support is separate from the visitation order. Even if you have little or no income, you may still have visitation rights, although a judge may order you to increase your income if you are able. Talk to your social worker or lawyer about your options.



13. LEAVING DCF CARE

If I do not sign on with DCF when I turn 18, do I have to do any of this planning stuff?

Yes! If you tell your social worker you do not want to sign on with DCF when you turn 18, or if you're leaving DCF after turning 18, your social worker has to work with you to create a transition plan. Your plan must include where you will live and your plans to support yourself. Your lawyer can help you negotiate with DCF about what the transition plan includes. The judge must review and decide whether to agree to this transition plan.

Will DCF still give me any services or help if I leave?

DCF has the Discharge Support Program to help young people who plan to leave DCF care. DCF offices have an Adolescent Outreach Worker or Outreach Supervisor to help you find the services you need. As long as you were in DCF care when you turned 18, you can work with an Adolescent Outreach Worker until age 21. For more information on signing on with DCF, see the chapter, "TURNING 18" at p. 12.

What can I get from the Discharge Support Program?

- Help from an **Adolescent Outreach Worker or your social worker** to find a job, housing, health care, and other services you may need
- Help applying and paying for college, a job training or certificate program
- Money to pay for things like clothing, rent and furniture
- In some cases, money for your security deposit, first and last month's rent, or initial utilities if you are moving into an apartment.
- Help finding internships and jobs and keeping them.

Checklist of things to do before leaving DCF

- ☐ Do you know when your last permanency planning hearing is and have you discussed your transition plan with your lawyer and social worker?
- ☐ Have you located safe housing that you have enough money to pay for?
- ☐ Who are the adults you want to stay in touch with? Do you know how to reach them? Put phone numbers on 'My Contacts' at front of this book. Have you talked to your lawyer or social worker if you want a long-term mentor?
- ☐ Do you have contact information for any sisters or brothers that are in care?
- ☐ Do you have your important documents like your photo I.D., social security card, credit report, birth certificate, school records, medical records, prescriptions and medication information, immigration documents and record of being in DCF care?
- ☐ Do you have your lawyer's business card and/or telephone number?
- ☐ Have you updated your address for all of your bills (credit card, cell phone, etc.), MassHealth, and benefits (TANF, WIC, Social Security, and other state sources of money) AND given your social worker that address PLUS a backup address?
- ☐ Do you have health insurance through MassHealth, your job or your college and do you have your insurance card?
- ☐ Have you found out where the local health services clinics are?
- ☐ Are you enrolled in the school program that you want to be in or know how to look for or keep a job?
- ☐ Have you completed your FAFSA form and applied for financial aid if you are going to college or a training school? (Website: <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>)
- ☐ Do you know what services or state benefits you can get after you leave DCF care?
- ☐ If you have a disability have you applied for adult Social Security Income (SSI) disability benefits, changed the payee for the benefits you already have (web-site: <https://www.ssa.gov>) applied for adult services from the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) or the Mass. Rehabilitation?
- ☐ Do you have a bank account at a bank with offices or ATMs near where you live and do you understand how to use your account?
- ☐ Do you know where to get help if you have a problem with immigration?
- ☐ Have you registered to vote? See <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/eleifv/howreg.htm>
- ☐ If you are a male citizen or immigrant male, have you registered for the draft? (See website: <https://www.sss.gov/RegVer/wfRegistration.aspx>)
- ☐ Do you have the information needed to file taxes or know someone to help you?

What are Your Sources of Income on Leaving DCF Care?

- Working full time: \$_____
- Working Part-Time \$_____
- SSDA/SSI: \$_____
- TAFDC \$_____
- Food Stamps (SNAP) \$_____
- Inheritance/Trust \$_____
- Savings \$_____

What is the Massachusetts Network of Foster Care Alumni?

Stay connected with other former foster youth through the Massachusetts Network of Foster Care Alumni (MassNFCA)! You can never have too many connections on your road to success. Behind every success story, there stands at least one amazing person and several extraordinary opportunities.

The Perks:

- Creating opportunity for current and former foster youth in the areas of education, employment, service and leadership

You're an alum of foster care if:

- You're 18 + and have been in foster care for any period of time in your life even if you continue to receive voluntary services from DCF between the ages of 18-22.

MassNFCA members welcome alumni and friends of foster care! Friends of foster care are people that care about foster youth. Join alumni and friends of foster care in building a network of intergenerational support and opportunities for alumni of all ages. Go to www.MassNFCA.org

14. CONTACT INFORMATION

Attorneys for Children/Young Adults:

Committee for Public Counsel Services: 617- 482-6212

Children's Law Center of Massachusetts: 1-888-543-5298

Substance Abuse Helpline: 1-800-327-5050

Planned Parenthood Hotline: 1-800-230-PLAN

MA Network of Foster Care Alumni – www.massnfca.org

Domestic Violence Helpline: STATEWIDE

Jane Doe, Inc.: Coalition Against DV: 877-785-2020

Spanish Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-223-5001

Mass. Victim Compensation & Assistance: 617-727-2200 Mass.

Office for Victim Assistance: 617-727-5200

Dept. of Corrections Victim Services Unit: 866-6-VICTIM

Massachusetts Department of Children and Families

DCF Central Office

Linda Spears, Commissioner
600 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02111
617-748-2000

Website: www.mass.gov/dcf

DCF Teen Living Program

617- 748-2400

Adolescent Outreach

Maureen Fallon Messeder
617-748-2231

DCF BOSTON REGION OFFICE

451 Blue Hill Avenue, 2nd Floor

Dorchester, MA 02121

(617) 989-9200

fax (617) 989-9250

Dimock Street Area Office

30 Dimock St.

Roxbury, MA 02119

(617) 989-2800

fax (617) 445-9147

Harbor Area Office

80 Everett Avenue, Suite 100

Chelsea, MA 02150

(617) 660-3400

fax (617) 884-0215

Hyde Park Area Office

1530 River St.

Hyde Park, MA 02136

(617) 363-5000

fax (617) 363-5175

Park Street Area Office

The Esquire Building

50B Park St.

Dorchester, MA 02122

(617) 822-4700

fax (617) 282-1019

DCF SOUTHERN REGION

Regional Office

110 Mulberry Street
Brockton, MA 02302
(508) 894-3700
fax (508) 559-7878

Arlington Area Office

30 Mystic St.
Arlington, MA 02474
(781) 641-8500
fax (781) 646-5172

Coastal Area Office

220 Forbes Rd. Ste.117, Rear.
Braintree, MA 02184
(781) 794-4400
fax (781) 794-4507 or 4510

Cape Cod and Islands Area Office

500 Main St.
Hyannis, MA 02601
(508) 760-0200
fax (508) 790-3006

Plymouth Area Office

61 Industrial Park Road
Plymouth, MA 02360
(508) 732-6200
fax (508) 747-1239

Fall River Area Office

1561 North Main St.
Fall River, MA 02720
(508) 235-9800
fax (508) 672-5404

New Bedford Area Office

98 North Front St.
New Bedford, MA 02740
(508) 910-1000
fax (508) 990-7321

Taunton/Attleboro Area Office

1 Washington St., Suite 21
Taunton, MA 02780
(508) 821-7000
fax (508) 822-1453

Brockton Area Office

110 Mulberry St.
Brockton, MA 02302
(508) 894-3700
fax (508) 559-7695

DCF NORTHERN REGION

Regional Office

280 Merrimack St.
.2nd Floor
Lawrence, MA 01843
(978) 557-2700
fax (978) 557-9231

Area Offices

Lowell Area Office

33 East Merrimack St.
Lowell, MA 01852
(978) 275-6800
fax (978) 452-5896

Framingham Area Office

300 Howard St.
Framingham, MA 01702
(508) 424-0100
fax (508) 872-8340

Haverhill Area Office:

3Ferry St.
Bradford, MA 01835
(978) 469-8800
fax (978) 469-8990

Lawrence Area Office

280 Merrimack St,
2nd Floor
Lawrence, MA 01843
(978) 557-2500
fax (978) 683-7455

Cambridge Area Office

810Memorial Drive
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 520-8700
fax (617) 354-0243

Malden Area Office

22 Pleasant St.
Malden, MA 02148
(781) 388-7100
fax (781) 324-2209

Salem Area Office

45 Congress St., Building 4
Salem, MA 01970
(978) 825-3800
fax (978) 825-9091

Lynn Area Office

330 Lynnway-Suite 201.
Lynn, MA 01901
(781) 477-1600
fax (781) 592-3380

DCF WESTERN REGION

Regional Office

140 High St., 5th Floor
Springfield, MA 01105
(413) 452-3350
fax (413) 781-4482

Area Offices :

Greenfield Area Office

143 Munson St., Unit 4
Greenfield, MA 01301
(413) 775-5000
fax (413) 773-5773

Holyoke Area Office

261 High Street
Holyoke, MA 01040
(413) 493-2600
fax (413) 533-9355

Springfield Area Office

140 High St., 4th Floor
Springfield, MA 01105
(413) 452-3200
fax (413) 739-5851

Robert Van Wart Center

112 Industry Avenue
Springfield, MA 01104
(413) 205-0500
fax (413) 205-0650

Pittsfield Area Office

73 Eagle St., 2nd Floor
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413) 236-1800
fax (413) 445-4507

DCF CENTRAL REGION

Regional Office

13 Sudbury Street
Worcester, MA 01609
(508) 929-2130
fax (508) 754-0420

Area Offices

Worcester West Area Office

13 Sudbury Street.
Worcester, MA 01609
(508) 929-2000
fax (508) 929-2161

Worcester East Area Office

151 West Boylston Drive
Worcester, MA 01606
(508) 793-8000
fax (508) 754-9803

South Central Area Office

185 Church St.
Whitinsville, MA 01588
(508) 929-1000
fax (508) 929-1100

North Central Area Office

690 Mechanic St., Suite 100
Leominster, MA 01453
(978) 353-3600
fax (978) 353-3800

15. FOSTER CHILD BILL OF RIGHTS

Preamble: The Department of Children and Families recognizes the following rights of children and youth in foster care. These rights are intended to guide the Department and its providers in the delivery of care and services to foster youth with the commitment to permanency, safety and well- being. This Bill of Rights was developed by the Department's Youth Advisory Board.

Every Foster Child:

- Shall be treated with respect by DCF staff, foster parents and providers without regard to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion and/or disability.
- Shall have family and relatives explored first as potential placement providers.
- Shall have reasonable access to a caseworker who makes case plan decisions. Reasonable access shall include the social worker and supervisor's office telephone numbers and email addresses as well as, a minimum, monthly visits by social worker.
- Shall participate in the development and review of the service plan and have input into changes to the plan that affect permanence, safety, stability or well-being. Youth age 14 and older should also be presented with the service plan for their review and signature.
- Shall be informed in a manner appropriate to age and level of understanding of the reason(s) the Department of Children and Families became involved with his/her family and why he/she is in care.
- Shall be included in the Foster Care Review meeting, Permanency Hearing and Lead Agency Team meeting if age 14 and older, unless documented by court order or service plan that participation would be detrimental to the youth. If the youth is unable to attend in person, he/she shall have the right to submit a written statement to be considered at the meeting.
- Shall be provided with information about a foster family or program and, whenever possible, Shall have an opportunity to meet the foster parent or program staff before placement occurs.
- Shall live with a family and in placement settings that provide a safe and nurturing environment while supporting permanency, and well- being, including encouraging youth's goals, interests, social and school activities.

- Shall have involvement as appropriate with family members and siblings and should participate in the development of visitation plans.
- Shall receive support from social worker, foster family/provider in maintaining positive contact with significant people (relatives, teachers, friends and community supports) including assistance with contact information and visitation.
- Shall be treated as a family member and, whenever possible, be included in a foster family's activities, holidays and rituals and be able to freely discuss reason(s) with social worker and foster family if choosing to not participate.
- Shall have access to medical, dental, vision, mental and behavioral health services regularly and more often as needed.
- Shall have access to information contained in medical, dental, and educational records held by DCF as well as personal documents such as social security card, birth certificate, green card, etc. When youth leave DCF, they shall be given copies of medical, dental and educational records held by DCF and original social security card, birth certificate, and green card.
- Shall have the opportunity to have private conversations with social worker on a regular basis. Foster youth should also be made aware of the process for contacting the supervisor and attorney regarding any questions or concerns.
- Shall be informed of the names and phone numbers of assigned attorneys and be aware that they can contact their attorneys and that there is a process to request a change of attorneys.
- Shall have access to personal possessions, personal space and privacy with allowance for safety.
- Shall receive assistance in acquiring life skills, education, training and career guidance to accomplish personal goals and prepare for the future and be informed of the post-secondary educational and employment supports available to youth in care through the Department.
- Shall be informed that DCF provides clothing, birthday and holiday payments to foster parents and placement providers for youth in placement.

16. SIBLING BILL OF RIGHTS

Preamble: The Massachusetts Department of Children and Families recognizes the importance and value of sibling relationships. These rights are intended to guide the Department and our providers in the delivery of care and services to foster youth with the commitment to permanency, safety and well-being. This Bill of Rights was developed by the New England Youth Coalition with the support of this the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors.

Whereas: the importance of sibling relationships are recognized and respected;

Whereas: sibling relationships provide needed continuity and stability during a child's placement;

Whereas: the sibling bond is unique and separate from the parent-child bond, and may include relations with people not linked by blood;

Whereas: siblings share similar history, heritage, culture and often biology that must be preserved;

Whereas: sibling separation is a significant and distinct loss that must be repaired by frequent and regular contact;

Whereas: every foster child deserves the right to know and be actively involved in his/her siblings' lives absent extraordinary circumstances.

Every Foster Child:

1. Shall be placed with siblings.
2. Shall be in close proximity to siblings if unable to be in same setting to facilitate frequent and meaningful contact.
3. Shall be afforded contact with siblings regardless of geographic barriers. The methods for contact should be outlined in the child's service plan.
4. Shall be actively involved in his/her siblings' lives and share celebrations including birthdays, holidays, graduations, and meaningful milestones.
5. Shall maintain consistent and regular contact that will be included in service planning.

6. Shall be included in permanency planning decisions relative to his/her siblings. Foster children should know what the expectations are for continued contact when a sibling is adopted or guardianshiped.
7. Shall be notified by the Child Welfare agency or its agents regarding a sibling's change of placement.
8. Shall be informed when a sibling is discharged from foster care. Alumni shall be allowed to maintain contact with a sibling who remains in state care.
9. Shall be supported by the Child Welfare agency in his/her efforts to maintain relationships with siblings who are not in care or have been adopted or guardianshiped. The Department shall facilitate such contact as appropriate.
10. Shall have predictable, regular contact with siblings that shall not be withheld as a behavioral consequence absent safety concerns.

17. IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS YOU SHOULD HAVE

Birth certificate: When you are in DCF custody, you should be able to get your original or a copy of your birth certificate from your social worker. Once you are out of DCF custody, DCF should give you the original birth certificate.

Social security card: If you are in DCF custody and have a social security card already, DCF should give you the original or a copy when you need it. If you never had a card or cannot find your card, you can apply for an original or a replacement card. Ask your DCF social worker for help before you turn 18 or go to: <http://www.ssa.gov/ss5doc/>.

MassHealth card: If DCF does not have a MassHealth card for you, you can get a replacement by calling MassHealth Enrollment Center at **1-888-665-9993**.

Medical records: If DCF does not have copies of your medical records, call your latest doctor or the doctor with the medical information you want to find out how you can get copies from them. You have a right to all of your medical records but will probably have to request them in writing.

DCF records: You have a right to all of your DCF records. DCF should provide you with all of your records if you give/send/fax to the attention of the Director of Areas where your social worker works a request in writing.

School records: You will want your high school diploma or GED certificate or the record of the classes you took and passed. Ask your latest school for this or ask your lawyer or social worker for help getting these records.

Green card: If you are not a citizen of the US, be sure to obtain your Green Card and keep it with you. If you lose your green card you can apply for a replacement. Ask your DCF social worker for help or go to <http://www.uscis.gov/i-90>.

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